

## Other UDOT Traffic Information Brochures:

- School Zone Safety
- Traffic Signals
- Left Turn Traffic Signals
- Pedestrian Signals
- Work Zone Safety

## For More Information:

Please contact a UDOT Region Traffic Engineer located in your area of the State:

Northern Utah (801) 620-1600

Salt Lake County (801) 975-4900

Utah County (801) 227-8000

Southern Utah (435) 893-4799

Or visit the UDOT website at  
<http://www.udot.utah.gov>

## How is a speed study requested?

A written request must be made to the UDOT Region Traffic Engineer in your part of the State. You may obtain the appropriate name and address by contacting the local UDOT region office at the numbers listed in this brochure.

## Speed-Related Safety Tips

- Higher speeds require increased separation to the car in front of you;
- Be sure to reduce your speed according to roadway and weather conditions;
- Be aware of speed reductions in work zones;
- Be aware of posted advisory speeds in areas such as curves.



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# SPEED LIMITS



**Division of Traffic  
and Safety**

# Speed Limits

The Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) has prepared this Traffic Information Brochure to educate concerned citizens interested in learning more about speed limits.

The setting of speed limits on Utah's highways and streets is often a controversial and emotional issue. Many citizens believe that lowering speed limits will improve traffic safety on their street or in their community. On the other hand, speed limits that are unrealistic are often disregarded by a majority of motorists who are normally careful and law-abiding drivers.

This brochure describes Utah's laws that apply to speed limits on our highways and the procedures for establishing posted speed limits.

## What is the law?

All drivers must always obey both the "basic speed law" and the "prima facie" speed limits. Utah's basic speed law (Section 41-6a-601 of the Utah Code) is similar to that throughout the United States and says:

***"No person shall drive a vehicle on a highway at a speed which is greater than is reasonable and prudent under the conditions."***

In the absence of posted speed limits, Utah state law also sets legal speed limits on different classes of highways, which are called the prima facie speed limits. These speed limits are as follows:

- Urban districts: 25 mph
- Other highways: 55 mph

State law defines "urban district" as "territory contiguous to and including any street, in which the structures devoted to business, industry, or dwelling houses are situated at intervals of less than 100 feet, for a distance of a quarter of a mile or more."

In the absence of posted speed limits, speeds that are higher than those above are considered prima facie evidence that the driver is traveling at a speed that is "greater than is reasonable and prudent".

At some locations, UDOT may determine that the prima facie speed for that class of highway is not reasonable or safe for the particular conditions on a section of highway. For example, a 55 MPH speed limit may not be reasonable in a non-urban developed area with homes and driveways.

State law allows UDOT to establish new prima facie speeds for specific locations on state highways, when it is based on an "engineering and traffic investigation." In such cases, the location on the state highway is typically called a "speed zone," and the speed limit is referred to as the "posted" speed limit.

## Misconceptions about Speed Limits

The public often asks for lower speed limits in response to highway safety concerns. In many cases, the posting of a lower speed limit on a section of highway is an appropriate measure to alert drivers of a change in road conditions, or of hazards that may not be readily apparent.

However, there are misconceptions that posting a lower speed limit will automatically decrease the speed of traffic, reduce accidents, and increase safety. Setting an unrealistically low speed limit that is not appropriate for road con-

ditions generally has no effect on vehicle speeds or safety. This has been demonstrated in numerous "before and after" research studies of speed limits changes.

The majority of drivers tend to drive a speed that their experience indicates is safe for the road conditions. An unrealistic speed limit may be disregarded and result in disrespect for the law by normally law-abiding drivers.

## How are Speed Zones Established?

The procedures for setting speed limits are based on the following traffic law principles:

- The majority of motorists drive in a safe and reasonable manner;
- The normally careful and competent actions of a reasonable person should be considered legal;
- Laws are established for the protection of the public and the regulation of unreasonable behavior of a few individuals;
- Laws cannot be effectively enforced without the consent and voluntary compliance of the majority.

Experience has shown that setting a speed limit at the "85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed" (the speed not exceeded by 85% of the drivers) generally reflects the behavior of the majority of drivers and results in a safe and reasonable speed limit.

Engineering studies to determine the proper speed limit include a statistical analysis of actual travel speeds and an analysis of the accident history. Other roadway conditions considered include road surface and shoulder conditions, grade, curvature, sight distance, and roadside development.